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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4891  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1033  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5636  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2018

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SUBJECT: CHART THAI PARTY LEADER BANHARN PRAISES PM NOMINEE  
SOMCHAI

REF: BANGKOK 2791 (PPP ENDORSES SOMCHAI)

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) The Ambassador called on former Prime Minister Banharn Silapa-Archa, leader of the Chart Thai Party (the second largest member of the governing coalition) September 16 just after the ruling People's Power Party (PPP) met to reconfirm plans to nominate Somchai Wongsawat as Prime Minister. Banharn told the Ambassador that the internal strife within PPP related to Somchai's nomination (reftel) had been resolved. Banharn said he had just spoken with Somchai by phone and had offered advice for Somchai's upcoming term as PM. (Note: the Parliament is scheduled to vote on the PM nomination on September 17.) Banharn's advice, which he felt Somchai would heed, was to lead with an economic program to improve the people's welfare, and to pursue constitutional amendment only in non-confrontational areas. Banharn felt the current crisis had been exacerbated by Samak's confrontational style and emphasis on constitutional revisions that could be seen as designed to benefit Thaksin and allied politicians.

12. (C) Banharn praised Somchai's performance during his term as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice. He characterized Somchai as gracious and soft-spoken, although adding that Somchai might need to become more decisive in his leadership style. Banharn expected that Somchai's family ties to former PM Thaksin Shinawatra (Somchai is married to Thaksin's sister Yaowapha, leader of PPP's northern faction) would not prove a liability, as Somchai knew this relationship would concern skeptics and therefore would make extra efforts to govern fairly.

13. (C) Banharn added that the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was appearing increasingly unreasonable in its continued protests at Government House. He believed it possible to settle the conflict between PAD and the government in the near term, but he declined to specify his prescribed strategy to accomplish this. Banharn said that the government would be patient with PAD demonstrators, and he did not think the use of force would be appropriate.

14. (C) Comment: Overnight media reports of internal PPP divisions over Somchai's upcoming nomination seem to have been unduly alarmist; it appears that the PPP faction opposing Somchai's nomination, led by Newin Chidchob, dropped

its opposition in exchange for a promise of one additional cabinet seat in Somchai's administration. Other politicians have publicly described Somchai in terms similar to those Banharn used. Only the PAD -- which has taken an extreme position in rejecting any figure associated with PPP -- seems unwilling to give him a chance.

JOHN